

beneficiaries to sign up for the prescription drug coverage without penalties, but nearly half the Nation's seniors do not know it.

The fact is that many beneficiaries are still unaware of the deadlines and the penalties, highlighting the fact that more time is needed. But even those who know about the deadlines and penalties are having a hard time with this confusing law. A new GAO report found that many beneficiaries are receiving inadequate, incorrect information from the Medicare hotline that many of us have been encouraging them to call to help them enroll.

It has been inadequate help to them and seniors should not be punished for that reason. The Wall Street Journal reported just a couple of days ago that the Federal investigators from the GAO posing as senior citizens found that the Medicare operators routinely failed to give callers accurate and complete information about the government's new drug benefit.

□ 2000

Investigators said that about one-third of their calls resulted in faulty responses or no response at all because of disconnected calls. This is not an atmosphere which should lead to the punishment of senior citizens who are making a good-faith effort to reach Medicare, to reach for the enrollment, to understand the program and make the decision for themselves or a member of their families on a timely basis.

Based upon a new analysis, there are probably about nine million beneficiaries with little or no drug coverage who still have failed to sign up. According to the nonpartisan CBO, delaying the deadline to December 31 would save more than 7 million beneficiaries from a lifetime of higher monthly premiums.

If the Republicans were truly interested in fulfilling the program that they designed, then they ought to extend the deadline so that senior citizens that we represent can have an opportunity to enroll and put off that penalty.

So I would hope—there is still time between now and the 15th, I would hope that now that they have passed this resolution, we would bring out legislation to provide an extension of time for seniors who are in fact acting in good faith.

The suggestion has not been made that seniors are trying to dodge the obligation. We know why there is a penalty. Eventually you want them all to sign up so people do not selectively enroll and cherry-pick and make the program more complex. But the indication is not that seniors are refusing or trying to dodge the program. The indication is that many are still reaching out in good faith to sign up for the program and to understand the program, but they just have not been successfully able to do that.

It seems to me that is not what a government should be doing is pun-

ishing people going through the process in good faith, but simply have not been able to negotiate it.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. ING-LIS). Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from North Carolina (Mr. JONES) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. JONES of North Carolina addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

AN IDEA WHOSE TIME HAS COME

Mr. GUTKNECHT. Mr. Speaker, I request unanimous consent that I be allowed to claim the time of the gentleman from North Carolina (Mr. JONES).

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Without objection, the gentleman from Minnesota (Mr. GUTKNECHT) is recognized for 5 minutes.

There was no objection.

Mr. GUTKNECHT. Mr. Speaker, I rise on the House floor tonight to talk about something that I think is one of the big solutions that we need to pursue here in the United States. And I would like to, first of all, talk about this first chart; and hopefully, Members can see it back in their offices. But this is a chart of the imports of petroleum as we have seen it from 1984 until 2005.

Back in 1984, we were importing less than 5.5 million barrels of oil a day; today, that number is over 13.5. In fact, I should say in 2005 it was about 13.5 million barrels a day. This is a scary chart because the direction is heading in the wrong direction.

Let's put some numbers on this. I am told that by this summer with \$70-a-barrel oil, we will be spending about a billion dollars a day to buy oil from countries, in many cases who are not particularly friendly to the United States. This is a serious problem. It is a challenge to our economic security and it is a challenge to our national security.

Now, renewable fuels are only part of the solution. I voted to increase the CAFE standards. I think conservation is an important part of solving our energy problems here in the United States. I believe in developing other kinds of energy. I voted consistently to develop the oil and the natural gas which we know is up in Alaska. I voted to expand the many uses of other energies.

But, Mr. Speaker, one of the things that we have not talked enough about, in my opinion, is our ability to grow more of our own energy. And so tonight I want to talk about renewable energy in general and ethanol in particular because I think there is huge misunderstanding, and it is not just among Members of Congress and the general public, it is among many of the policymakers even in the Department of En-

ergy. Mr. Speaker, there is still a misunderstanding about how much it costs to produce ethanol. In fact, we had a hearing of the Science Committee about 6 months ago. We had three top energy experts who testified before the committee. I asked all of them, I said, How much does it cost to produce a gallon of ethanol? Well, they started to look at their watches and their shoes and it was clear they did not want to answer the question.

Well, I said, make a guess. And the low guess, and these are energy experts, the low guess among those three experts was \$2 a gallon. The high estimate was \$3 a gallon. And I said, Would it surprise you to know that we are actually producing ethanol in Minnesota for less than \$1.20 a gallon? In fact, some of the plants at that time with lower natural gas prices were actually producing ethanol for about \$1 a gallon.

Today, with corn at about \$2 is a bushel and with oil at about \$70 a barrel, the cost right now to produce a gallon of ethanol at an efficient plant in the upper Midwest is about \$1.20 a gallon. Gasoline, on the other hand, right now costs about \$2.10 a gallon for unleaded gas.

Now, I have to be clear, though, and we want to be fair in this discussion. You do not get as many Btus, British Thermal Units, out of a gallon of ethanol as you do a gallon of unleaded gasoline. In fact, it is about 20 to 25 percent less. So you get less energy out of a gallon, partly because ethanol is 35 percent oxygen. That is good, though, because it means it burns much cleaner than gasoline.

Ethanol is better for our environment. It is better for our economy because that billion dollars a day that we may be spending this summer we are sending to countries that in some respects do not like us, and in worst cases they may be using part of that oil revenue to actually fund the terrorists.

The beauty of producing energy here in the United States, clean-burning ethanol in the United States, is that all of that money stays here in America where it recycles through our own economy. A new plant, for example, recently opened just west of Mankato, Minnesota, in the little town of Lake Crystal, Minnesota, and they told us they will be employing, on average, 42 workers in that plant, and the average starting wage will be somewhere over \$16 an hour plus benefits. These are good jobs that help our own economy right here in the United States.

But the point really needs to be made, not only is it better for our economy, it is better for our environment, but it is actually cheaper. So some people say, well, if it is better for the economy, if it is better for the environment and it is cheaper, why is more of it not available?

Well, the answer is simply this. The oil companies do not make any money on ethanol. I am not here to say that